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CALIFORNIAN PLEADS GUILTY TO DRUG TRAFFICKING IN MARYLAND

Greenbelt, Maryland - Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that Samuel Estrada, Jr., age 27, of Whittier, California pleaded guilty today before U.S. District Judge Alexander Williams, Jr. to the charge of conspiracy to distribute 1000 kilograms or more of marijuana.

According to the statement of facts provided to the court as part of the plea agreement, from about January 1, 2001 to June 5, 2003 Estrada directed numerous shipments totaling 3,000 to 10,000 kilograms of marijuana from the Los Angeles, California area to Silver Spring, Maryland. These loads averaged between 1,000 and 1,200 pounds of marijuana, with the largest load being about 1,500 pounds. After delivering the marijuana to Silver Spring, the courier typically received suitcases or backpack type bags containing the marijuana proceeds in amounts of \$600,000, \$900,000 and \$1,500,000 for transport back to Estrada's house in California.

According to the statement of facts, on June 3, 2003, 830 pounds of marijuana were seized by Arkansas State Police from a hidden compartment in a box truck owned by Estrada and passing through

Arkansas. Couriers delivering the marijuana to Maryland cooperated with DEA and Arkansas investigators, leading DEA agents to witness the delivery of the 830 pounds of marijuana to Estrada, who also owned a home in Silver Spring. When the marijuana was transported to a storage unit in Silver Spring, authorities arrested Estrada and recovered the 830 pound load, an additional 200 pounds of marijuana and roughly \$119,000. The estimated street value of the seized marijuana was \$1.5 million.

Estrada faces a mandatory minimum of 10 years incarceration up to a maximum of life imprisonment, as well as a fine of up to \$4 million. The sentencing hearing is scheduled for January 28, 2004 at 9:30 a.m.

The case is a result of an investigation by the Drug Enforcement Administration, Montgomery County Department of Police and Arkansas State Police. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney James M. Trusty in Greenbelt, Maryland.